

Feb. 12, 2016



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## Montana FSA: February 2016 eNewsletter

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### USDA Farm Service Agency - Montana

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Bruce Nelson

### 2016 Montana FSA Producer eHandbook Available for Farmers and Ranchers

FSA in Montana has issued a 2016 eHandbook of Program Factsheets for farmers and ranchers available online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt). To review the eHandbook you may click on the link below to view it as a PDF and/or download it to your computer.

[Montana FSA: 2016 Producer eHandbook of FSA Program Factsheets \(pdf\)](#)

**State Committee:**  
Steve Carney, Chair  
Floyd Dahlman  
Kelly Flaherty-Settle  
Anita Matt  
Patricia Quisno

**Montana USDA Directories:**

[Online Directory of FSA Offices](#)

[PDF of Montana FSA Directory](#)

[PDF of Montana USDA Directory](#)

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## **USDA Offices Closed on Mon., Feb. 15 in Observance of a Federal Holiday**

USDA offices will be closed on Mon., Feb. 15 in observance of George Washington's Birthday (better known as President's Day), a federal holiday. USDA will be open for business on Tues., Feb. 16th.

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## **Reasonable Accommodations**

People with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in FSA programs should contact the County Executive Director in the FSA Office in your area or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339. Alternatively, you may also contact Montana FSA Civil Rights Coordinator Jennifer Cole at (406) 587-6786 or [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov).

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## **CRP: Conservation Reserve Program General Signup 49 Deadline Approaching: Feb. 26, 2016**

FSA would like to remind Montana farmers and ranchers that the deadline for enrollment in the competitive Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup 49 is Feb. 26, 2016.

To be eligible for CRP, land must meet cropping history requirements of being planted or considered planted four (4) out of six (6) years from 2008-2013, and, meet one of the following: 1) have a weighted average Erodibility Index (EI) for the three predominant soils of 8 or greater; 2) be enrolled in CRP that is scheduled to expire on Sept. 30, 2016; or, 3) the offered acreage must be located in a National or State Conservation Priority Area.

CRP General sign-up 49 offers will be ranked nationally based on the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) points received on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Acreage lying within a State Conservation Priority Zone will receive additional EBI points. Montana has two state priority zones; Water Quality and Wildlife. Links to these zones may be found at:

[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/mt49cpas.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/mt49cpas.pdf) and  
[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/mt49pz.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/mt49pz.pdf).

Farmers and ranchers who are interested in enrolling acreage in CRP and have acreage that lies within one of the zones on the map, should contact their local FSA office for opportunities to receive additional EBI points for certain CRP practices.

Farmers and ranchers enrolled in a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract should contact their local NRCS office for available options if they are interested in enrolling in CRP.

Participants in CRP establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish native plant species on marginal agricultural lands for the primary purpose of

preventing soil erosion and improving water quality and related benefits of reducing loss of wildlife habitat.

For more information on CRP, contact your local FSA office or [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt).

A printable version of this release from the [Montana FSA Web site](#) is available [HERE](#).

[Map of Montana CRP Signup 49 Priority Zones \(pdf\)](#)

[Map of Montana CRP Signup 49 Conservation Priority Areas \(CPAs\) \(pdf\)](#)

[CRP Conservation Reserve Program Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)

[CRP 49th General Enrollment Period Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)

[CRP 49th General Enrollment Period EBI Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)

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## **CRP: FWP's Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters – March 7 Application Deadline**

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is conducting another signup for Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters administered through FWP's Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program. The state program pays landowners an add-on payment for lands enrolled in USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Open Fields is aimed at conserving Montana's productive game bird habitats enrolled in CRP and at providing additional public hunting access for game bird hunting.

Producers in the following 17 counties will receive priority for Open Fields enrollment: Cascade, Chouteau, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Fergus, Glacier, McCone, Pondera, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Teton, Toole, Valley and Wibaux,

The \$5-per acre incentive, offered through Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, is available to private landowners who have a minimum of two years left on their federal contract or are enrolling new lands into CRP.

New this year, producers who enroll cropland into new CRP contracts will be eligible to receive a bonus payment of up to \$800 to help cover seed costs for wildlife friendly seed mixes.

Applications for enrollment in Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters will be scored by FWP. Landowners may offer additional acreage to help square up access boundaries and increase evaluation scores. Applications may be submitted through March 7, 2016. For more information and an application, visit FWP online at [fwp.mt.gov/ugbep](http://fwp.mt.gov/ugbep); and then click "[Open Fields Enrollment](#)".

Funding for Open Fields has been made possible through a Volunteer Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program grant awarded by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For details, contact Debbie Hohler at 406-444-5674, or by e-mail: [dhohler@mt.gov](mailto:dhohler@mt.gov).

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## **NAP: Producer Meetings Scheduled in Missoula, Kalispell, Browning, Great Falls and Sidney Feb. 16 to Feb. 19**

FSA and Montana State University (MSU) Extension are hosting five upcoming Farm Bill informational meetings to inform Montana producers about important changes to the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) authorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill).

The NAP program, administered by local FSA offices across Montana, provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occurs due to natural disasters. FSA will provide an overview of the NAP Program and MSU Extension will explain the online NAP Farm Bill Decision Tool that is available to assist current and prospective NAP producers. The decision tool can be accessed at <http://fsa.usapas.com/NAP.aspx>.

### **NAP Meeting Schedule**

- Feb. 8, Bozeman, 10 a.m. to noon, Bozeman Public Library (626 E. Main St.)
- Feb. 8, Billings, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., Residence Marriot (956 S. 25th St. W)
- Feb. 16, Missoula, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., Guesthouse Inn & Suites (3803 Brooks St.)
- Feb. 17, Kalispell, 10 a.m. to noon, Hilton Garden Inn, Glacier Room 1 (1840 Hwy 90 3 S)
- Feb. 17, Browning, 5 p.m. to 7 pm. Blackfeet Tribal Conference Room, NW of Blackfeet Tribal Office
- Feb. 18, Great Falls, 10 a.m. to noon, Montana ExpoPark Gold Buckle Room (4003 3rd St. NW)
- Feb. 19, Sidney, 10 a.m. to noon, Richland County Extension Office (1499 N. Central Ave.)

For more information, including a [printable schedule](#), visit MSU Extension's Farm Bill website at <http://www.montana.edu/farmbill> and Montana FSA's website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt).

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in a meeting should contact Jennifer Cole on 406.587.6786, or Federal Relay Service at 1-800.877.8339, and [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov) at least two business days prior to the meeting.

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## **NAP: March 15 Deadline for 2016 NAP Coverage**

FSA reminds Montana farmers and ranchers that March 15 is the sales closing deadline for 2016 spring crops covered by the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

NAP provides financial assistance to eligible producers when natural disasters cause catastrophic loss of production (low yield) or prevented planting of an eligible noninsurable crop by providing coverage equivalent to the catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance. In the event of a natural disaster, NAP provides catastrophic level (CAT) coverage based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50 percent of expected production at 55 percent of the average market price for the crop. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized additional coverage levels ranging from 50 to 65 percent of production, in 5 percent increments, at 100 percent of the average market price. This additional "buy-up" coverage must be elected by a producer by the application closing date. Producers who elect additional coverage must pay a premium in addition to the service fee. Crops intended for grazing are not eligible for additional coverage.

Eligible producers can apply for coverage at their local FSA office using form CCC-471, Application for Coverage. Producers must file the application and pay the applicable service fee on or before the application closing date for the applicable crop. The service fee is the lesser of \$250 per crop or \$750

per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,875 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties.

Beginning farmers or ranchers, limited resource producers, and underserved farmers, including minorities and women, are eligible for a waiver of the service fee and a 50 percent premium reduction when they file form CCC-860, "Socially Disadvantaged, Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer or Rancher Certification." If you have questions regarding beginning, limited resource, and underserved producer definitions and eligibility, please contact your local FSA office.

NAP is available on commercially-produced agricultural commodity crops for which the catastrophic risk protection level of crop insurance is not available. If the Risk Management Agency (RMA) offers coverage for a specific crop and intended use in the county, then NAP coverage is not available for that crop.

USDA has partnered with Michigan State University and the University of Illinois to create an online tool at [www.fsa.usda.gov/nap](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap) that allows producers to determine whether their crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP and to explore the best level of protection for their operation.

A copy of a Montana NAP factsheet is available at: [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/16\\_mtnap.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/16_mtnap.pdf). For more information on NAP and other FSA programs, contact your local FSA office and visit Montana FSA online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mt](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt). Additional resources are available at the Montana State University (MSU) Extension Farm Bill Website at: <http://www.msuextension.org/farmpolicy/nap.html>.

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## Registration Open for the 5th Annual Women in Agriculture Conference in Bozeman

Mark your calendar and get registered for inspiration, knowledge and networking on **Sat., March 19, 2016** for the **5th Annual Women in Agriculture Conference**.

"**Power Up Your Farm**" is the theme for the fifth annual Women in Agriculture Conference and will be an engaging, interactive day full of inspiration, learning and networking with other women farmers. This conference is a one-day event held simultaneously in 31 locations throughout Washington, Alaska, Idaho, Montana and Oregon.

**MONTANA LOCATION:** On Sat., March 19, 2016, Dr. Kate Fuller host the Montana location in Bozeman for the Women in Agriculture remote conference at MSU in 231 Linfield Hall, the new CHS classroom. The early bird registration by March 5 is \$25.00 and late registration after March 6 is \$30.00. Seating is limited to 40 people. Scholarships are available for beginning farmers, college agriculture students and 4-H and FFA members. To apply go to <http://womeninag.wsu.edu>.

There are a block of rooms reserved at the Best Western Plus Grantree Inn under block **Women in Ag**. The phone number is 406-587-5261. The Grantree will also have a shuttle service to bring participants up to MSU.

For registration and other information, please visit: <http://womeninag.wsu.edu>.

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## Registration Open for USDA Tribal Outreach Forum on March 23-25 in Bozeman

Registration to attend the 2016 USDA Tribal Outreach Forum in Bozeman on March 23 to 25 is now open, the USDA Montana Food & Agriculture Council (SFAC) announced.

The three-day outreach forum is hosted by USDA in partnership with the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) and Indian Nations Conservation Alliance (INCA). USDA administers federal agricultural programs, including farm loan, risk management, conservation, price support, housing, business and community programs that benefit farmers, ranchers, individuals and communities.

USDA representatives from Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will provide program and agency updates. Speakers include the USDA Ombudsman Joanne Dea and representatives from Intertribal Agriculture Council, Montana State University Extension, Governor's Office of Indian Affairs and the Montana Department of Agriculture. INCA will facilitate an open panel discussion with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Tribal and USDA representatives focusing on serving tribal operators and tribal communities. The forum concludes with a workshop addressing Food Security on Montana's Indian Reservations hosted by USDA, Montana Food Bank Network and the State of Montana's No Kid Hungry Initiative.

The forum's keynote speaker is Verna Billedeaux, Montana State University Blackfeet Extension Agent. Billedeaux's address will focus on Developing Youth and Volunteers in Indian Country – Blackfeet 4-H Program & IAC Youth Leadership Efforts.

Registration is free and open to the first 100 people who register. Registration will be confirmed on a first-come, first-served basis. Registration form is available at [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/16\\_usdatribalforumreg.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/16_usdatribalforumreg.pdf).

To register, send a completed registration form to FSA via email at [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov), Fax to (855) 546-0264 attention Jennifer Cole or mail to: Jennifer Cole, USDA-FSA State Office, P.O. Box 670, Bozeman, MT 59771.

The forum will be held at the Bozeman Holiday Inn (5 East Baxter Ln.) in Bozeman. Lodging reservations can be made at the Bozeman Holiday Inn by calling 406.587.4561. The room block is available until **March 4, 2016** by requesting the "Tribal Outreach" group rate of \$89 plus fees/taxes.

For questions or more information, contact Jennifer at (406) 587-6786 or [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov).

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to participate in this meeting should contact Jennifer Cole at (406) 587-6786 or [jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.cole@mt.usda.gov) or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339 by March 18, 2016.

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## FLP: USDA Expands Microloans to Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

*Producers, Including Beginning and Underserved Farmers, Have a New Option to Gain Access to Land*

USDA Farm Service Agency will begin offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans will be especially helpful to beginning or underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

The microloan program, which celebrates its third anniversary this week, has been hugely successful, providing more than 16,800 low-interest loans, totaling over \$373 million to producers across the country. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013. Seventy percent of loans have gone to new farmers.

Now, microloans will be available to also help with farm land and building purchases, and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers, and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

This microloan announcement is another USDA resource for America's farmers and ranchers to utilize, especially as [new and beginning farmers and ranchers](#) look for the assistance they need to get started. To learn more about the FSA microloan program visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans), or contact your local FSA office. To find your nearest office location, please visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## IRS Reporting for Tax Year 2015

IRS-1099-G detailing payments you received from the Commodity Credit Corporation have been distributed. This annual report of program payments is a service intended to help report taxable income and not intended to replace a producer's responsibilities to report income to IRS.

CCC will not issue form IRS 1099-G when CCC program payments total less than \$600 for the calendar year. In addition, producers which receive program payments from multiple counties will receive only one IRS Form 1099-G showing all payments from all counties.

FSA staff cannot interpret IRS regulations or advise producers about which payments to report on their income tax returns. However, county office staff can review payments for accuracy.

Although refund information is not shown on the IRS 1099-G, a Customer's financial data including refund information, program payment amounts, and prior year CCC-1099 information is conveniently available via the internet through the FSA "Financial Inquiries" database (FSA-FI). Instructions for obtaining a FSA-FI user ID and password are available on the FSA web site at: <http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov/eauthWhatIsAccount.html>

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## ARC-PLC: Enrollment Period for 2016 USDA Safety Net Coverage Ends Aug. 1

FSA has announced that producers who chose coverage from the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can visit FSA county offices through Aug. 1, 2016, to sign contracts to enroll in coverage for 2016.

Although the choice between ARC and PLC is completed and remains in effect through 2018, producers must still enroll their farm by signing a contract each year to receive coverage.

Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to schedule an appointment to enroll. If a farm is not enrolled during the 2016 enrollment period, producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program.

The two programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain and sweet rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity. For more details regarding these programs, go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc).

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## Upcoming FSA Program Deadlines

- **Feb. 26:** Last Day of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup 49
- **March 15:** 2016 NAP Application Closing Date for Spring Crops
- **March 16:** 2016 CRP Spring Managed and Routine Grazing Period Begins (with prior County Committee Approval of Request)
- **March 31:** Final Availability Date for Loans and LDPs for Barley, Canola, Crambe, Flaxseed, Honey, Oats, Rapeseed, Wheat and Sesame Seed
- **May 14:** 2016 CRP Spring Managed and Routine Grazing Period Ends
- **May 15 to July 15:** Primary Nesting Season
- **May 31:** Final Availability Date for Loans and LDPs for Corn, Dry Peas, Grain Sorghum, Lentils, Mustard Seed, Rice, Safflower Seed, Chickpeas, Soybeans and Sunflower Seed
- **July 15:** 2016 Acreage Reporting Deadline for Spring Seeded Alfalfa Seed, Forage Seeding, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Fruit (except cherries), Vegetables, Christmas Trees, and all Spring-Seeded Crops and any other crops not required to be reported by previously announced deadlines.
- **July 16:** CRP 2016 Summer/Fall Managed Haying and Grazing Begins (with prior County Committee Approval of Request)
- **Aug. 1:** Deadline for 2016 ARC and PLC Enrollment

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## USDA News from Rural Development: Energy Workshops for Agricultural Producers & Small Businesses

USDA Rural Development in partnership with Montana DEQ (Renewable Energy Program) will host a series of seven free energy workshops at various Montana locations - "Making Energy Work for Your Small Business or Agricultural Operation".

These free, one-day workshops will feature the USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant and loan program, the Montana DEQ Renewable Energy Program, as well as, a comprehensive lineup of speakers, experienced in facilitating both Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy projects here in Montana.

- **Thompson Falls | February 16** | State Building (2405 Tradewinds Way) | Call 406.676.5901 to RSVP and for more info
- **Ronan | February 17** | Lake County Community Development Corp. (407 Main Street) | Call 406.676.5901 to RSVP and for more info
- **Superior | February 18** | Mineral County Chamber (102 River Street) | Call 406.676.5901 to RSVP and for more info
- **Helena | February 23** | Helena Chamber (225 Cruse Ave) | Call 406.585.2545 to RSVP and for more info
- **Butte | March 15** | Thornton Building (65 E Broadway) | Call 406.585.2545 to RSVP and for more info
- **Livingston | March 22** | Park County Library (228 W Callender) | Call 406.585.2545 to RSVP and for more info
- **Miles City | March 23** | Location TBD | Call 406.627.6297 ext. 121 to RSVP and for more info

Contact one of the meeting contacts listed above or visit the USDA RD Montana website at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt> for more information.

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## USDA News from NRCS: USDA to Invest \$150 Million through Conservation Stewardship Program to Help Improve Working Lands

USDA announced that \$150 million in funding is available for agricultural producers through the [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP), USDA's largest conservation program that helps producers voluntarily improve the health and productivity of private and Tribal working lands. USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) plans to add an estimated 10 million acres to the rolls of CSP during fiscal 2016.

"The Conservation Stewardship Program is one of our most popular programs with producers because it results in real change on the ground by boosting soil and air quality, conserving clean water and enhancing wildlife habitat," Vilsack said. "With this investment, we'll be able to build on the already record number of acres enrolled in USDA's conservation programs, enabling producers to achieve higher levels of conservation and adopt new and emerging conservation technologies on farms, ranches and forests."

NRCS accepts applications for CSP throughout the year, but producers should submit applications by **March 31** to [USDA service centers](#) to ensure they are considered for enrollment in 2016.

Participants with existing CSP contracts that will expire on Dec.31, 2016 have the option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands. Applications to renew are also due by **March 31**.

NRCS also makes CSP available to producers as an additional opportunity to participate in regional landscape-level conservation efforts including the [Sage Grouse Initiative](#), [Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative](#), [Longleaf Pine Initiative](#) and [Ogallala Aquifer Initiative](#).

Funding is available for more than 100 kinds of enhancements nationwide to help participants:

- Improve soil quality through use of cover crops, conservation crop rotations and other activities that increase soil productivity.
- Use water wisely and improve water quality through enhancements such as more efficient irrigation systems and weather monitoring.

- Restore habitat for wildlife and pollinators such as the greater sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chicken and monarch butterfly through the use of better grazing systems and improved plant management.

A [CSP self-screening checklist](#) is available to help producers determine if the program is compatible with their operation. As part of the application process, applicants will work with NRCS field personnel to complete a resource inventory of their land to determine the conservation performance for existing and new conservation activities. The applicant's conservation performance will be used to determine eligibility, ranking and payments.

For more information, contact your local NRCS office.

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## **USDA Regional Climate Change Hubs Available**

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack established the first ever USDA Regional Climate Change Hubs in February 2014 at seven locations around the country to provide more information to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners on the increasing risks of fires, pests, floods, and droughts associated with a changing climate. For more information on the Northern Plains Regional Climate Hub, visit <http://climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/northernplains>. For general information on Climate Hubs, visit <http://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/sites/default/files/USDA%20Regional%20Hubs%20for%20Risk%20Adaptation%20and%20Mitigation%20to%20Climate%20Change%202015.pdf>

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